

C. 3

*The
Missionary Enterprise
in China*

By the Hon. CHESTER HOLCOMBE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR
FOREIGN MISSIONS

THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN CHINA

By The Hon. CHESTER HOLCOMBE

For 20 years connected with the Diplomatic Staff
of the United States in China.

Author of "The Real Chinaman,"
"The Real Chinese Question," etc.

Reprinted by permission from
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY
Copyright, 1906, by Houghton, Mifflin & Company

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

Congregational House, 14 Beacon Street
BOSTON, MASS.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

The Hon. Chester Holcombe, the writer of the following paper, which first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for September, 1906, and is now reprinted through the courtesy of the publishers of that magazine, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., is a graduate of Union College, N. Y., and in early life went to China, where he was appointed secretary and interpreter to the American Legation in Peking by Gen. Grant. Mr. Holcombe has been connected with the diplomatic service in various posts, and knows thoroughly the language and the people of China, has resided long in Peking and has traveled throughout almost the entire empire. He is a diplomat and author, his two volumes, "The Real Chinaman" and "The Real Chinese Question," having been widely circulated and commended, both in this country and in Great Britain.

As a diplomat of experience, Mr. Holcombe holds no brief for the defence of missions. He writes frankly of what he has himself seen, and in regard to which he has had exceptional opportunity for acquiring accurate information. The net result is that he makes it clear that the great mass of indiscriminate condemnation and criticism of missions and missionaries has its foundation in lack of information and ignorance of real conditions. For this, in these days, there is no valid excuse.

THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN CHINA.

WITH the rising tide of American interest in China, the unsatisfactory condition of our relations with that great and ancient nation, with the general unrest there, which is the inevitable consequence of movements toward a new and modern life, and the local and sporadic outbreaks of violence incident to such unrest, one hears again the old and familiar cry that the missionaries are responsible for at least the larger portion of the varied forms of hostility exhibited toward foreigners. Their persistent and impertinent attempts to force an alien and undesired religion upon the Chinese are, so it is confidently asserted, peculiarly offensive to officials and people alike, a hindrance to trade, and a menace to peaceful relations. The Boxer movement it is pointed out, was an attempt, vain in result, to throw off the hateful missionary incubus, to rid the Chinese of a body of unwelcome interlopers who defamed their ancient and cherished forms of belief,—which are as good as ours, some will add,—and who sought to supplant them with another, wholly unsuited to their mental and spiritual conformation. The loss of life in that Boxer movement, confined almost wholly to missionaries and native converts, together with several more recent exhibitions of violence in which missionaries alone have suffered, are cited as full evidence of the correctness of this conclusion.

It might be pointed out that the Boxer uprising was an abortive attempt to drive all foreigners of every class from China, and thus to save the Empire from partition and distribution among the great cormorant powers of Europe,—which was believed to be the distinct purpose and inevitable result of the continued presence of foreigners there ; that, in fact, missionaries formed the only class of alien residents who had no part in the development of such a fear and frenzy ; that they suffered most because they alone of all alien classes had established themselves at remote parts of the interior, in close touch with the people, and out of reach of battleship, cruiser, or any other means of defence or place of refuge. In a general raid against all foreigners, the missionary was first attacked because he was first at hand, and, to put it frankly and truthfully, he suffered because he was in or part of bad company ; not because he was a missionary, but for the crime, in Chinese eyes, of being a foreigner.

So too, in response to the charge of attempting to force an alien and inappropriate form of belief upon a people well suited to and with their own, it might be said that, in the entire history of missionary effort in China, or in other parts of the Far East, nothing even remotely approaching the exercise of force has been attempted. To talk to persons who choose to listen, to throw wide the doors of chapels where natives who desire may hear the Christian faith explained and urged upon their attention, to sell at half cost or to give the Bible and Christian literature freely to those who may care to read them, to heal

the sick, without cost, who come for medical treatment, to instruct children whose parents are desirous that they should receive education,—surely none or or all of these constitute methods or practices to which the word *force* may be applied under any allowable use of the English language. And this, thus briefly summarized, constitutes the entire body of missionary effort in China. To put it in another form, there is no difference between the work of pioneer preachers in the far West, that of laborers or “settlement workers” in the slums of great cities, or of eloquent pastors of wealthy and fashionable churches in Back Bay district of Boston or Fifth Avenue in New York, and that done by missionaries in China. If the last named force the acceptance of Christianity upon their hearers, then so do all the others.

The work is absolutely identical in character and method, differentiated from the others only by simple forms of presentation in order to reach the more effectively, minds wholly unfamiliar with truths presented. Those who assert that Christianity is wholly unsuited to the Chinese character, that the Chinese will not and cannot become sincere and loyal Christians, are most respectfully referred to the long list of native martyrs, of both sexes and all ages, who readily and gladly gave up their lives in the Boxer movement, rather than abjure the Christian faith.

It might further be added that unselfish men and devoted women, enthusiastic in what appears to them at least, to be a great cause, who are ready to expatriate themselves and to abandon all their ambitions and their lives to its promotion in foreign lands, have

as good a right to carry out their self-sacrificing wishes, to enter China and do their chosen work there by all proper methods, as have their fellow citizens who seek the same Empire in order to win a fortune by dealing in cotton goods, kerosene, silk, tea, or possibly in opium. They have precisely the same right, no greater and no less, to the protection and sympathetic assistance of their own government as any other class of citizens. To more than this, American missionaries have never made claim.

Beyond these brief and general statements, intended to correct certain widely prevalent misconceptions of fact, and to clear the ground for what is to follow, it is not the purpose of this article to denounce or defend evangelistic work in China or the presence of missionaries there. With the quality of the work done, the doctrines taught, or the agencies employed, this paper has nothing to do. After all, it is a matter of comparatively trifling importance what fellow foreigners may think of missionaries or missionary work on the other side of the world. Their approval or condemnation counts for little. What the Chinese themselves think, what is their attitude and that of their government toward the enterprise, are questions of vastly greater moment. To answer these questions from a purely secular standpoint, to deal with the missionary enterprise as a factor in the modernization of China, to explain the exact attitude and policy of the Imperial government toward it and the causes of friction, constantly growing more rare, between its promoters and Chinese officials and people, these together constitute the motive of this article. Neither

conjecture nor hearsay will form the basis of conclusions reached, but facts gained through a long and necessarily close study of the missionary question in China, innumerable discussions, and much practical experience in the adjustment of so-called "missionary cases."

In any effort to gain a correct understanding of this or other questions which affect our relations with the Chinese, certain characteristics of the race should be kept carefully in mind. They are an intellectual people, and possessed of fully the average amount of shrewd common sense, intermingled with some ancient and crude superstitions, which serve as a variant. With the single exception of the Emperor, their officials of all grades, from the highest to the lowest, are of and chosen from the people themselves, and local self-government exists there to an extent not seen elsewhere. In China the people are, in fact, masters of the situation, and a spirit of sturdy democracy is everywhere evident. They judge men or nations, much as we do, by what they do rather than what they say. Hence in any given conditions or circumstances, if we infer Chinese feelings or conduct from what our own would be in the same situation, we shall not go far wrong, always, however, bearing the fact in mind that they are more patient than we.

Then it is necessary to keep certain facts of Chinese history in plain sight. The first knowledge which the Chinese had of the western world, by which is meant western Europe and America, came through buccaneering expeditions, or piratical attacks,

as they would now be called, upon the Chinese coasts by the Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Spaniards. In more modern times, barely seventy years ago in fact, the entering wedge to break open the barred doors of Chinese seclusion was driven home by the military power of Great Britain mainly in order to force 'a market for Indian opium, of which that Christian government held a monopoly. From that day to this every form of foreign enterprise in China, irrespective of character or nationality, has been tainted with opium and hindered by the hatred, suspicion, and contempt engendered by the eventual success of this monstrous scheme to despoil China in brain, body, and pocket, for the sake of gain to the exchequer of Great Britain. To this must be added more than sixty years of unjust and inexcusable diplomacy, the exploitation of China to suit the rival ambitions and satisfy the ever growing greed of the great European powers, robberies of its territory upon every border, and a consistent disregard of every claim which the Chinese might put forward to the ownership of their own territory and the management of their own affairs. Most clearly it must be understood that, not the missionary in the cabin, but the opium and gunpowder in the hold, has fixed the hatred and established a permanent opposition among the Chinese toward all things foreign. Once for all, it must be most emphatically declared that, not Christian propagandism, but most unchristian policies and practices of aggression, dominance, and spoliation upon the part of certain governments of Europe brought about the horrors of the Boxer uprising.

The earlier general treaties between China and foreign governments make no special concessions to any particular class of alien residents within the Empire. They are not recognized as merchants, missionaries, students, or travelers, but provided for *en masse*, as citizens or subjects of the government with which the treaty is negotiated. Our own government is particularly careful upon this point, asking special favors for none, and exerting its efforts, when occasion arises, for its people as American citizens only. It is not permitted even to state the calling or avocation of the bearer of a passport, and though the request has often been made by Chinese officials that this be done in the case of missionaries in order that special protection and assistance be afforded them, it has been necessary to refuse the request as contrary to statute or regulation. The missionary possesses only such privileges, exemptions, and immunities under treaty, as are granted to his fellow alien of every other class and occupation. The right to reside, acquire property, and to pursue his calling at certain specified centres of population, mostly upon the sea-coast, and to travel freely under passport, throughout the interior, covers all to which he is entitled under the official pledge and seal of the Imperial government of China.

Yet, from the inception of what may be termed modern missionary enterprise in China, the missionaries have gone beyond this narrow limit of favor, gone beyond the treaty ports, until now they can be found in every province and in nearly every large city. Even in many mud-walled villages and rural hamlets

missionary families are now to be found quietly and permanently established in homes, in close touch and intimate association with the native residents. This special favor, unobtainable by any other alien class in the Empire has assuredly not been won either through any exercise of governmental force or diplomatic pressure. It has been slowly gained by the exercise of patience, tact and discretion upon the part of the missionaries themselves, under the open eyes and with the tacit, though unspoken, consent of the imperial authorities. In rare cases, missionaries have been driven out of interior points by local hostility ; but in no instance has the Peking government demanded their withdrawal, or our own government urged their right of residence there. This successful missionary expansion, as it may be called, speaks volumes for the wisdom and patient zeal of those who have accomplished it. It does more than this. It shows clearly a line of policy and procedure, which has now been consistently followed by the Imperial authorities for more than forty years, and which may here be stated. The Emperor will neither force nor forbid the residence and labors of missionaries at any points beyond the treaty ports. But recognizing and appreciating the self-denying and philanthropic character of missionary effort, he will gladly permit those engaged in it to establish themselves throughout the interior, wherever they may be able to do so with the consent and good will of the people of the locality. It is not known that this well-established line of policy has been formulated and officially communicated to any foreign

power. But it has been verbally declared to the writer by members of the Cabinet and other high authorities of the Empire, upon many occasions.

It would not have been surprising if the Chinese authorities, while conceding so great an advantage to missionaries, should have coupled with it a disclaimer of all responsibility for any mishaps, including mob violence, to which they might be subjected in seeking residence where they had no treaty right to be. But it has done nothing of the sort. It has never, within the knowledge of the writer, attempted to shirk full responsibility for the lives and property of the American citizens in any part of the Empire, or to claim that missionaries, in establishing themselves in the interior, ran their own risks, took their lives in their own keeping, and must themselves bear any financial losses which local opposition to their presence might entail upon them. The utmost in the nature of criticism or complaint that can justly be made upon Imperial action in such cases, is that the Peking government would perhaps be more dilatory in making reparation in such a case than in one similar which might occur within the limits of a treaty port; that it appeared to regard the trouble somewhat in the light of a local quarrel between missionaries and populace which should be adjusted by the local authorities. And advice, rather than orders, for punishment of offenders and indemnity for losses, often appeared to be the limit to which the officials at the capital were willing to go. At the same time it must in justice be admitted that if the authorities of the legation saw fit them-

selves to take the affair before the local officials, they never failed to secure ample reparation. Can as much be said regarding anti-Chinese mobs in the United States?

Aside from this most practical evidence of the appreciation and favor with which the government of China regards the missionary enterprise, there is a great mass of testimony from individuals high in rank and authority throughout the Empire, all serving to show that this unselfish effort for the good of Chinese humanity has gained for itself an honored place in influential minds once suspicious of or openly hostile to it. Large donations to mission hospitals and schools from official or wealthy Chinese, a great and rapidly increasing demand for Christian literature and educational works, special and unsolicited courtesy and assistance shown to missionaries, all these indicate that the day of Chinese opposition to missionary work among them has passed, and that, whatever may be the opinion of foreigners either resident in China or in their native lands, China itself, as represented by the leaders of thought and public opinion in it, has recognized and accepted the missionary enterprise as one of the most important and useful factors in the creation and development of new life in that ancient and antique Empire.

Not to mention other evidence to this fact, take one incident of recent occurrence in the good city of Boston. The Chinese Imperial government has recently dispatched two commissions, composed of officials of high rank and a numerous staff, to visit

and study various important subjects in America and Europe. When arrangements were being made for the visit of the first of these commissions to Boston, and a long list of points in or near the city which they might wish to see was submitted to them, among the first selected were the offices of the American Board, the parent of all foreign missionary organizations in the United States, and having large interests in that work in China. The selection of this active centre of foreign evangelistic effort was unguided and entirely spontaneous. In their addresses and informal remarks during the visit to those offices, the commissioners expressed in unqualified terms their appreciation and strong approval of the missionary enterprise in China, and their gratitude for what had been and was being done there. "We know who are our friends," said they again and again. Yet neither of the Chinese commissioners was a convert to Christianity, they were under no obligation to visit one of the headquarters of the American missionary effort in China, or, being there, to go beyond polite and non-committal remarks. Hence, and all the more, their declarations must in all fairness be taken as strong official endorsement and approval.

With much the same feelings they expressed their delight at what they saw at Wellesley College, and recognized in it the grander development of what American women were attempting to do for the women of China. Speaking by the way, the treatment of the female sex is the darkest blot upon the civilization of China. A revolt against the earlier

practices in this direction has already begun there, and probably nothing in the entire journey of this commission into foreign parts will work such immediate and lasting change for the better, as the visit to Wellesley. To cite one other proof of Chinese official approval of the missionary enterprise; in the later commercial treaties, rendered necessary by the Boxer uprising, foreign missionary organizations are permitted to acquire real estate in all parts of the Empire, and "to erect such suitable buildings as may be required for carrying on their good work." No similar concession has been made to any other class of alien residents. Thus the voluntary and unwritten policy long followed by the Emperor has been formulated and shaped into a solemn engagement and pledge.

To speak quite frankly and to the fact, for many years more unfriendly criticism and complaint of the presence of missionaries and their work in China has been heard from foreigners, either like them alien residents in the Far East, or at home, than from Chinese officials or people. It has even been customary and the fashion with a certain class, which need not be more particularly described, in speaking of the missionary to prefix an offensive and condemnatory adjective to the word. Regarding the the opinions and judgments of such with all possible charity, they have been far more fearful of the evil results of all attempts to do good in far Cathay than have the Chinese themselves. Upon the other hand, in many years of intimate official and friendly intercourse with all classes of Chinese in every part of

the Empire, the writer has never heard even one complaint of or objection to the presence of American missionaries in China or the character of their work. He has heard himself, and all other foreigners of every nationality and calling, cursed in most violent terms for having fastened the opium horror upon the Chinese race, and the suggestion made, in a paroxysm of anger and hate by some human wreck wrought by the drug, that foreigners "would do well to take away that awful curse before they had the impudence to talk to the Chinese about their Jesus." But, aside from crazed and mistaken denunciation, no Chinaman within his hearing has had anything but pleasant words to speak regarding the missionary enterprise, as conducted by Americans, in his land.

In the discussion of particular "missionary cases," as they are called, and by which is meant cases of complaints made by missionaries of interference with them in their work,—interference which sometimes took the form of mob violence,—Chinese officials have complained, in most courteous language, of the indiscreet methods or conduct of particular missionaries. Yet this complaint has never been so strong as the writer would himself have used, and has been invariably coupled with a hearty approval and high appreciation of the work of the missionary body as a whole.

It would be idle to deny or ignore the fact that cases of serious friction between the natives and foreign missionaries have arisen in the past and are still of less frequent occurrence. By far the largest percentage of such most unfortunate conflicts has

been caused by the unwise and improper interference of missionaries between their native converts and the Chinese authorities, or by the assumption of civil rank and authority by missionaries. Since, in the sixty years of modern missionary enterprise in China, no single charge or complaint of that nature has been made against an American missionary, such causes of trouble need not be discussed here. The conduct of European governments toward China, their greed, aggression, and general attitude of domination, long prejudiced both officials and people against missionaries, who were popularly believed to make use of their professedly philanthropic work only as a cloak, and to be, in fact, spies of their own governments whose aim was the seizure of the Empire and subjugation of its people. But with greater mutual intelligence and less frequent occasions of misunderstanding, these causes of friction and conflict have, in great measure, disappeared. The true character and great value of the missionary enterprise as a factor in the modernization of China, and in bringing it into line with the great nations of the world, is almost universally recognized and appreciated, at least by those who are being most radically affected by it. And it should be realized and freely admitted that, in a nation where popular opinion and sentiment to an almost unprecedented extent guide and limit governmental policy,—for all the nominally autocratic authority of the Emperor,—the presence of such a force at work quietly among the people, is of the utmost value in the establishment and maintenance of good relations and the development to their full limit of all

mutual interests. The missionary has won his way, found his work in China, which, while primarily religious in character, is greatly helpful in all worthy secular affairs. No other foreigner comes in such close and intimate touch with the native as he. And he is the unrecognized and uncommissioned representative of what is best in every phase and department of American life.

In these days of intense commercialism, when trade appears, at least, to have relegated all other concerns and interests to the background, when not only men but governments are bending every energy to the enlargement of existing fields of commerce and the development of new lines and centres of trade, one most important result, one valuable by product, as it may be called, of missionary enterprise in China deserves to receive more serious consideration than has hitherto been accorded to it. In it is to be found an agency, unequaled by any other, for the development of our commerce with that vast population. Every missionary is, whether willingly or unwillingly, an agent for the display and recommendation of American fabrics and wares of every conceivable sort. Each missionary home, whether established in great Chinese cities or rural hamlets, serves as an object lesson, an exposition of the practical comfort, convenience, and value of the thousand and one items in the long catalogue of articles which complete the equipment of an American home. Idle curiosity upon the part of the natives grows into personal interest which in turn develops the desire to possess. Did space permit, an overwhelming array of facts

and figures could be set forth to prove the inestimable, though unrecognized, value of the missionary as an agent for the development of American commerce in every part of the globe. The manufacturing and commercial interests in the United States, even though indifferent or actively hostile to the direct purpose of the missionary enterprise, could well afford to bear the entire cost of all American missionary effort in China for the sake of the large increase in trade which results from such effort.

When the government and people of the United States are ready, and determined, to return to a dignified and decent policy in the treatment of the Chinese who are within our borders or may seek to come here; when we realize that now is always the time to apologize for an insult or to right a wrong; when, in short, we resume our earlier attitude and practice of fair play and genuine, helpful friendliness toward the Chinese race and nation, we shall easily secure a renewal of their confidence in us and win back all and more than all that now, thanks to our own folly, appears to have been lost. And the American missionary enterprise in China will play a part in our relations with that great Empire of even greater value in years to come than it has in the past.

